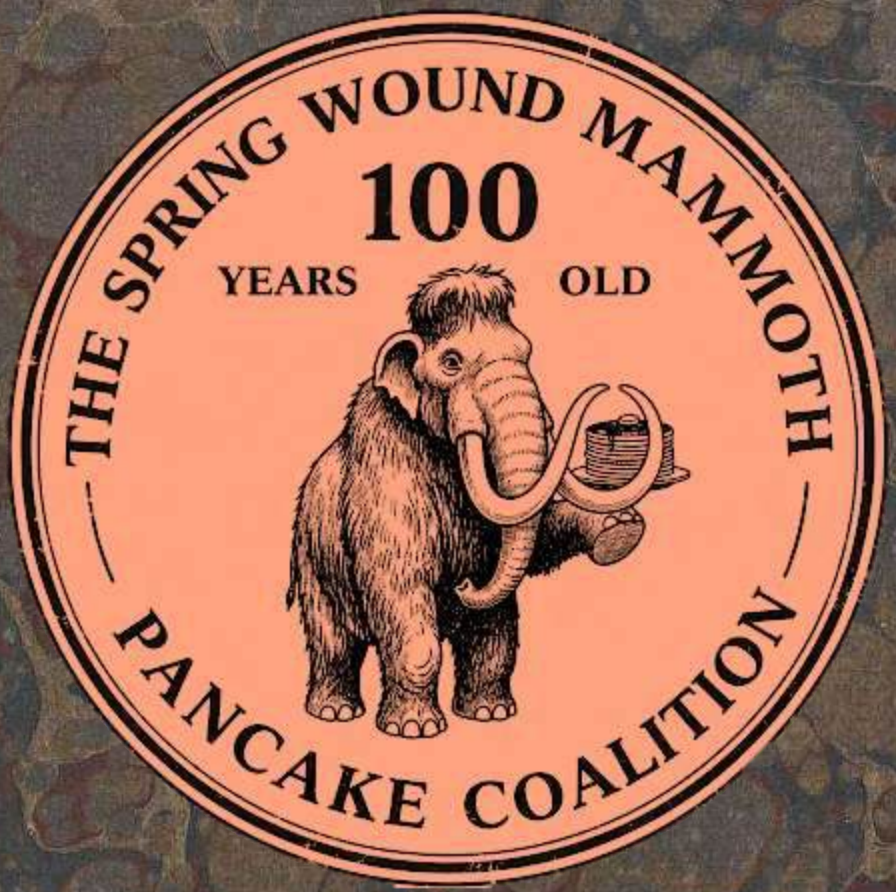
Fowl Feathered Review
No 201


THE SPRING WOUND MAMMOTH
100
YEARS OLD
PANCAKE COALITION

Issue 201: Abstraction takes the world for granted.

Fowl Feathered Review is a quarterly, a disordered artifact of the human impulse to categorize and consume the ephemeral. Produced by the Springwound Mammoth Pancake Coalition—an entity distinct from its waffle-centric counterpart—it is birthed under the Fowlpox Press imprint. Virgil Kay, its editor, presides over this enterprise from a paper canoe adrift on the Passagassawakeag, a river of dubious depth and even more dubious inhabitants. Surrounded by featherheads and their aquatic card games, Kay's reign is absolute, his word the final arbiter in the transformation of boastful souls into doormats. Layout and visual conceits are the province of Cookie Granola, while melodrama and histrionics fall under the purview of Childe Harold. Silent Bill, in his characteristically taciturn manner, provides necessary pauses. The review's structural integrity, or lack thereof, is the domain of Unkie Bob, whose talents extend to the mitigation of typographical errors and the prevention of electrical conflagrations. Everett Enótita serves as Kay's indispensable amanuensis, and the Ecum Secum Literary Brain Trust, in a gesture of dubious beneficence, offers nominal financial support. Printed upon the verdant expanse of Bald Porcupine Island, and laced with the enigmatic Kraa, a bioengineered culinary enigma, the Fowl Feathered Review remains a testament to human ingenuity, or perhaps merely a symptom of cultural decline. ISSN: 1929-7238.

"I am an observer of life, a non-participant who takes no sides. I am in the regimented society, but not of it."
--Moondog, The Viking of 6th Avenue

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Submissions

Fowlpox Press: A Submission Guide for the Determined (or Deluded) To the Aspiring Artist (or Sandwich Enthusiast):

1. **Craft** (or **Culinary Construct**): 2-227 poems, a numerical range that hints at both ambition and a troubling lack of self-editing, may find their way to our digital doorstep (fowlpoxpress@mail2poet.com). Alternatively, for the visually inclined, paintings numbered 2-953 (a prolific career, or perhaps a basement overflowing with forgotten canvases?) are welcome. We are also, inexplicably, open to submissions of twelve-inch sandwiches.
2. **The Gatekeeper:** Address your offerings to Virgil Kay, Editor. In posession of remarkably discerning taste, or so he believes, Virgil is a rooster of some renown, a creature of instinct and inexplicable confidence. His title, "China Wok Habitue," suggests a broader palate than one might expect from a bird, though it's more likely a testament to the local takeout joint's generous portions. (**Please note:** Include a bio, a desperate plea for recognition that will likely join the unread masses in the digital purgatory of our slush pile.)
3. **Format:** Poems, those valiant attempts at capturing the human experience in meter and rhyme, should be attached in a Word document or PDF. Paintings, windows into your soul (or a weekend spent with Bob Ross reruns), must be submitted in JPEG, TIFF, or a format our aging technology can comprehend. Jokes, if they exist, should be delivered in MP3 format. We are, alas, not equipped to handle the nuanced art of the live performance. Sandwiches, a curious offering in the realm of artistic expression, require clear plastic wrapping and a small packet of Kewpie Mayonnaise. (**Pro-tip:** The Kewpie packaging is, undeniably, a work of art in its own right, and we encourage you to admire it before consumption.)
4. **The Cycle Continues:** We exist in a perpetual state of acceptance and rejection. A Sisyphean task, some might say. We receive submissions 365 days a year, a testament to the relentless hope, or perhaps blissful ignorance, of aspiring artists. However, with a heavy heart (and a full crop), we must inform you that rejections also occur 365 days a year.
5. **The Sandwiches:** Ah, the sandwiches. These, unlike your artistic endeavors, find a permanent home within our editorial sanctum. Virgil, in his infinite wisdom, has determined that a diet rich in carbohydrates is essential for maintaining his regal demeanor.
6. **Leap Year Follies:** Leap years, those extra days gifted by the whims of the calendar, offer no reprieve. Aspiring poets, it seems, are undeterred by such temporal anomalies. You are, however, cordially invited to "take a flying leap" during these additional 24 hours.

Please proceed with caution. Artistic aspirations are a delicate dance, and the path to publication is littered with the fallen hopes of countless dreamers. But hey, maybe your sandwich is killer. Just remember, Kewpie or bust.

Fowl Feathered Review | Poets & Writers (pw.org)

"Non ignora mali, miseris succurrere disco."

— Virgil, The Aeneid

The Empathic Echoes of Wenceslas Square: A Chronosynclastic Anagogic Manifesto

By Nicolas Frampton

Wenceslas Square in Prague, Czech Republic—a vast, cobblestoned lung breathing in the ghosts of revolutions, exhaling the stale breath of tourists and forgotten dissent. Here, under a sky smeared with the gray pallor of unfulfilled dreams, Viktor stands as a man unmoored. Not just any man, but a university-educated relic, his face a canvas of contradictions: the garish grin that wrinkles the flesh between his eyebrows, a mask of confidence hiding the quiet terror of obsolescence. He strides with deliberate purpose, each step a echo of authority, yet beneath it, a tremor– the kind that comes from years of analyzing behaviors like his own, as if reading from a dog-eared copy of Milan Kundera's *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, where lightness masks the unbearable weight of existence.

He approaches a street vendor's cart, cluttered with trinkets that seem alive in their decay: faded postcards whispering secrets, cracked porcelain dolls staring with accusing eyes, and a solitary book—Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose*, its pages thumb-worn, stained with coffee rings and marginalia scrawled in a frantic hand. "What is this?" Viktor asks, not with curiosity, but with the weight of a ritual incantation. His voice, deep and resonant, carries the echo of professional poise, but his eyes betray a flicker of doubt, a microexpression of scrutiny that reveals the man behind the facade: confident, yes, but crumbling under the weight of his own evaluations.

The vendor, a woman bent by time, responds not with words but with a splash of icy water from her gloved hand— a gesture both absurd and profound, evoking the ritual clowns from Viktor's fractured memories. In this liminal space, where the square's edges blur into dream logic, the question hangs like a noose, tightening around the throat of reality.

Viktor feels it: the confidence that once signaled authority now feels like a lie, a social norm turned weapon. He grins wider, but it's a grin laced with empathy for his own folly— a man who knows the psychological scripts by heart, yet cannot escape them.

Poetry glitch (bleeding through like a digital scar):*What is this? A query etched in cobblestone veins, / grin cracking like code, confidence a fragile shell, / water drips, time unspools, and the square whispers back: / you are the question, unanswered, alone...*

Memory intrudes, fluid and unforgiving, as if the square itself is a sentient character, pulling Viktor into its depths. He recalls a scene from his past—or is it borrowed from Kundera's pages?—a sterile store bathed in fluorescent light, where tall professionals with mouths wired shut chant in deep, commanding tones: "WHERE ARE THE CRACK-TOONS?" Clowns emerge, their icy-gloved hands dripping rhythmically, performing exaggerated rituals amid distorted melodies. It's not just a memory; it's a metaphor for his life, a show-don't-tell unraveling of his evaluative curiosity. That garish grin, he realizes with a pang of empathy, isn't just a social signal—it's a shield against the chaos, a way to impose order on a world that's slipping away.

But empathy deepens the cut. Viktor sees himself in the clowns: figures trapped in their own performances; their gestures deliberate yet hollow. He thinks of the rant that bubbles up from his core, the one about societal collapse— no guaranteed jobs, no status symbols worth a damn. "Eating overpriced ice cream isn't a flex," he mutters to the vendor, his voice a witty blend of elevated diction and raw slang, "it's a gouge, a selfish farce in a world where mansions burn and deer shit on golf courses." The vendor, her eyes mirroring his own contradictions, splashes more water, and in that moment, Viktor feels the universal ache: the loss of meaning, the lightness that crushes.

Sensory overload collapses boundaries—the water's chill tastes of regret, the square's hum smells of burnt paper, and the Eco book in his hands pulses with a heartbeat, its pages a palimpsest of his life. A glitched poem emerges from the margins, handwritten and haunting:

Status quo, a ghost in the machine, itching, / ice cream melts to tears, children wait in carts of dread, / the end not with a bang but a whisper, glitched and repeating, / empathy's knife twists in the grin's shadow...

The absurdity escalates, gonzo and unhinged, as Viktor becomes both observer and observed. He seizes the Eco book, its cover warping like a living thing, and launches into a manifesto-rant, his voice sharp with wit and intellectual fire. "This is it, fancy pants!" he declares, echoing his inner turmoil with Shakespearean flair— a soliloquy of defiance. "The yacht club's ashes, the repossessed dreams— it's all a comedy of errors, where confidence is king and empathy the fool."

Around him, the square transforms. The vendor morphs into a clown-deer hybrid, anthropomorphic and philosophical, her gloves dripping liquid light. She recites public speaking tips with ironic precision: "Speak slowly, clearly—command attention, like this pause..." She halts, and in the silence, figures from Viktor's memory materialize: lanky professionals with wired-shut mouths, chanting "WE SEEK THE CRACK-TOONS" in voices that boom with Dale Carnegie's authority. But the crack-toons aren't cartoons; they're cracks in the soul, fissures where poetry bleeds, symbolizing the loss of control.

Viktor, with empathetic insight, sees their pain: the professional's confident stride hides a fear of irrelevance, their evaluative grins a mask for existential dread. He engages in dialogue that's both absurd and profound, his words a witty dance of contradiction. "You seek cracks?" he says to a clown, his tone dry and incisive. "Look in the mirror— we're all fractured, holding together with spit and string, quoting Eco while the world burns." The clown splashes water in response, and Viktor laughs, a sound that's half-mad, half-melancholic, revealing his own vulnerabilities: the regret of a life spent analyzing others, the redemption in embracing the chaos.

Random elements intrude—a Mr. Clean coupon flutters like a mockingbird, a twelve-inch sandwich appears as a absurd offering—and the narrative coils into non-linearity.

A cat, running surveillance from a bench, narrows its eyes in scrutiny, mirroring Viktor's face.

Poetry glitches through again, raw and rhythmic:
The grin, a mask of thorns, blooming pain, / confidence crumbles to empathetic dust, / Wenceslas Square a stage for human folly, / where clowns and scholars waltz in broken light...

The energy subsides into an uncanny pause, a moment of quiet revelation. Viktor stands amid the dripping silence, the square's details sharpening with Flaubertian precision: a crack in the cobblestone that feels like a wound, the distant tram clanging with the weight of history. He feels empathy for the vendor, the clowns, even the deer that invades the scene– all symbols of a shared human condition. "We're all waiting for the bombs or the shooters," he whispers, his voice understated yet profound, "but maybe it's not the end we're fearing– it's the emptiness before it."

In this liminal space, the narrative delves into universal themes: the contradiction of human nature, the lightness of being that crushes, the redemptive power of connection. Viktor's grin fades, replaced by a raw vulnerability, as he clutches the Eco book like a confessional.

The story fractures, a chronosynclastic breakdown where reality unravels. Viktor questions his existence, breaking the fourth wall with witty self-awareness: "Am I the protagonist or just a pawn in this absurd revue? You, reader, with your own grins and doubts– are we not all clowns in this farce?" The clowns return, their rituals escalating into chaos, voices blending Carnegie's tips with Kundera's irony. "Use eye contact to inspire trust," one says, but their gaze pierces with judgment, exposing the facade of professionalism.

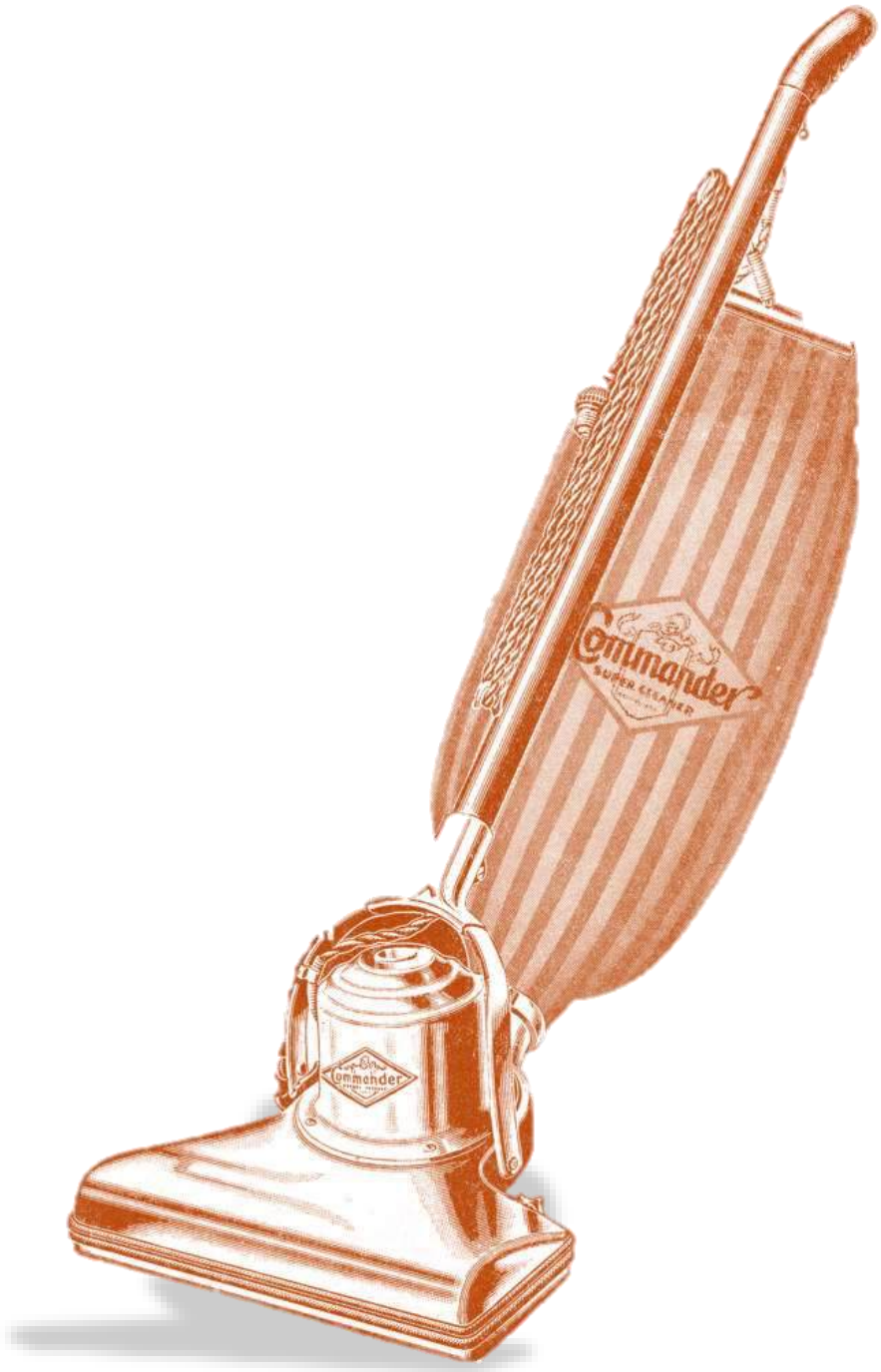
Viktor's empathy surges— he sees the universal struggle in their eyes, the fear of obsolescence, the weight of societal collapse. His body elongates in surreal distortion, and he rants with passionate intensity: "No more boxes to check, no more symbols— just the raw, bleeding heart of it all!" Poetry bleeds through, glitched and incantatory:

Bombs or shooters? The end is empathy's echo, / status crumbles, grins fade to tears, / Wenceslas weeps for the light we bear, unbearable, / and in the unraveling, redemption whispers...

The climax resists resolution, a raw Czech Informel tear in the fabric, leaving ambiguity and emotional depth.

The scene fades into echo, not conclusion. Viktor lingers in the square, the Eco book a talisman of his journey. The vendor-clown vanishes into mist, and a final glitched poem lingers:

What is this? A cycle of grins and grief, / empathy's light in the absurd dark, / Prague's heart beats on, chronosynclastic and human, / ending not, but echoing into the void...
In this merged manifesto, ontology dissolves, but empathy endures— a witty, insightful dance with absurdity, revealing the profound in the chaotic. Wenceslas Square remains, a stage for the eternal revue of human contradiction.


Commander
SUPER CLEANER
Commander

Love Sucks

By C.E. Hans

she left me for the upright vacuum–
not just a machine but her midnight partner,
the one she danced with in the dark,
the one she spun around the room with,
its cord like a leash to her hips,
its whirring hum a heartbeat she trusted more than mine.

I hear her in my head–
the way she moved,
the way she twirled in her flats,
feet flat and stubborn,
like she was trying to forget something she loved too much,
or maybe trying to remember what she'd lost in the spin.

her body, caught in that rhythm–
a fandango,
a cha-cha,
anything that made her forget the silence,
the way her feet shuffled,
her hips swaying with a stubborn grace,
dancing in the dark,
like she was trying to outrun the ghost of me,
or the ghost of the dirt she swept away.

and I call her through the night–
calling her name in broken whispers,
yelling into the static,
hoping she'll hear me over the hum of her new love–

the vacuum, that tricky Dirt Devil,
that sneaky, whispering thing she's got her hands on now.

I want to get even with that devil–
that tricky, dust-stirring, whirling plastic shack job,
that sneaky, dust-devouring, spin-cycle fiend,
the one she favors more than my voice,
more than my touch,
more than the quiet I used to give her when she danced alone.

I want to pull the plug,
yank the cord,
make it stop spinning–
make her see she's lost when she's so busy chasing the next whirl,
the next dust bunny,
the next spin of her hips,
the next song she dances to in the shadows.

I want to shout through the night–
tell her I know she's out there,
twisting and turning with that devil–
that I know she's trying to drown me out with its hum,
trying to forget me in a whirl of dust and rhythm,
trying to erase the way she used to dance with me–
the way her flatfooted steps were stubborn,
but true.

But she's gone–
left me with the ghosts and the hum,
with the echo of fandangos and cha-chas in the dark,
with the memory of her feet sliding,
her stubborn persistence in the dance–
and me, calling into the night,

hoping she'll hear me,
hoping she'll come back,
or at least stop spinning so fast with that tricky plastic shack job,
before she's lost forever in the whirl of her own making.

Universe of Broken Dreams, East Side

By Travis Scott

He stands before the cracked mirror, the glass shattered into a thousand distorted reflections. The room is dim—flickering fluorescent light sputters overhead, casting elongated shadows on peeling wallpaper that smells of damp plaster and neglect. The faint hum of distant traffic seeps through a cracked window, a muted reminder of a world that moved on while his mind unraveled.

In his hand, a grease pencil—reversed, as if trying to erase his own thoughts—traces a backward list on the mirror's surface. The words bleed into a watery smear: *buy milk, walk the dog, forget the past*—each phrase dissolving into watercolor wash of confusion. The mirror, a fractured testament to countless versions of Máj, releases each shard into a universe of broken dreams and failed plans, where a lonely star hums a distant prayer, flickering in and out of focus. In this cosmic junkyard of rusted gears and twisted steel, the boundaries between reality and hallucination dissolve into a swirling vortex.

The four archetypal architects—failures of their craft, echoes of a bygone discipline—haunt these reflections:

- The Visionary: Once a proud master builder, his face now lined with disillusionment. His blueprint scrolls are torn and frayed, symbols of dreams deferred. His eyes, like vacant windows, stare into a void where innovation turned to ruin.
- The Neglecter: A figure marred by decay—his gnarled hands stained with rust and dust. He embodies neglect—of structure, of duty, of himself. His broken plans lie scattered, forgotten.
- The Saboteur: A shadowy silhouette, eyes darting with chaos and destruction. His presence signifies sabotage—of design, of hope, of the very foundations he once sought to uphold.
- The Registered Creep: An unsettling, lurking figure—a figure who embodies invasive observation and creeping paranoia. His eyes are always watching, always

calculating. His presence is invasive, intrusive—an architect of suspicion and mistrust. His face is partially concealed, a permanent smirk or leer, hinting at secrets he keeps hidden beneath a veneer of authority. His whisper is a constant echo—a reminder that someone, somewhere, is always watching, recording, waiting.

Máj's gaze flicks from shard to shard, each reflecting a different failure—each an aspect of his own crumbling psyche. The ghosts of these architects loom in the fractured mirror, whispering of broken promises and dreams turned to dust.

The bathroom, cold and sterile, is filled with the faint scent of disinfectant and despair. Máj kneels beside a shoebox, its lid slightly ajar, releasing a musty, decaying odor. Inside are trembling mice—tiny survivors of neglect—whose hearts thrash against his thumb.

Their fragile lives are a fragile reminder of what remains. His snake, coiled like a neglected ruin, watches him with unblinking eyes. The room is silent except for the rustling mice and the distant drone of the city's indifference.
He picks up his phone, the screen flickering with concern from Dr. Alistair.

"And you say this fear manifests most acutely... when?" the doctor's voice probes.
Máj shifts, feeling the cold porcelain beneath him.

"Just... the crunch," he whispers, tasting the word like dry bread. That crisp, final sound—like the collapse of a structure—triggers a shiver of dread. It's betrayal—an invasion of his fragile peace.

He glances at the shoebox again.

"Just a moment," he says softly, setting the phone aside. "He's hungry." Without waiting for a reply, he ends the call, the screen going black.

He gently pulls out a mouse. Its tiny heart thrums in his palm. He feels the trembling life—so fragile, so fleeting. The mice are always counted, always watched. The snake remains coiled, unmoved, a symbol of indifference amid his chaos.

The outside world continues unaware—the city's distant sirens, the hum of life—yet inside, Máj's universe is a storm of fears, memories, and fractured truths.

The shards reflect a thousand different selves—each whispering secrets, doubts, and failures. The cosmic star flickers again, its hum a distant lament. Máj's eyes drift over the fragments—each a portal into a universe where the four failed architects dwell.
The Visionary, once proud and full of hope, now lost in ruins, his blueprint torn in half.
The Neglecter, a figure of decay, his structures long fallen, his hands stained with neglect.

The Saboteur, chaotic and destructive, whispering of plans undone, foundations shattered.

The Registered Creep, an insidious observer—his eyes always watching, recording—an architect of suspicion and paranoia, lurking in every reflection, every shadow. His face is a mask of smirk or menace, revealing nothing but hinting at secrets best kept hidden.
They stare back at him from the fractured reflections, their voices echoing in his mind, blurring the boundaries of reality.

He runs his finger over a leftover crouton on the bathroom floor—a crumb of his own anxiety, hardened and forsaken, like the ruins of failed projects. The silence deafens him more than any saxophone solo or trumpet cry.
He knows what the doctor would say:

"The fear of croutons is a symbolic manifestation of your underlying anxiety. It's not about the texture."

But the fear persists. The crunch—the final collapse—haunts him. He feels the weight of the mice, one by one, always counted, always watched.

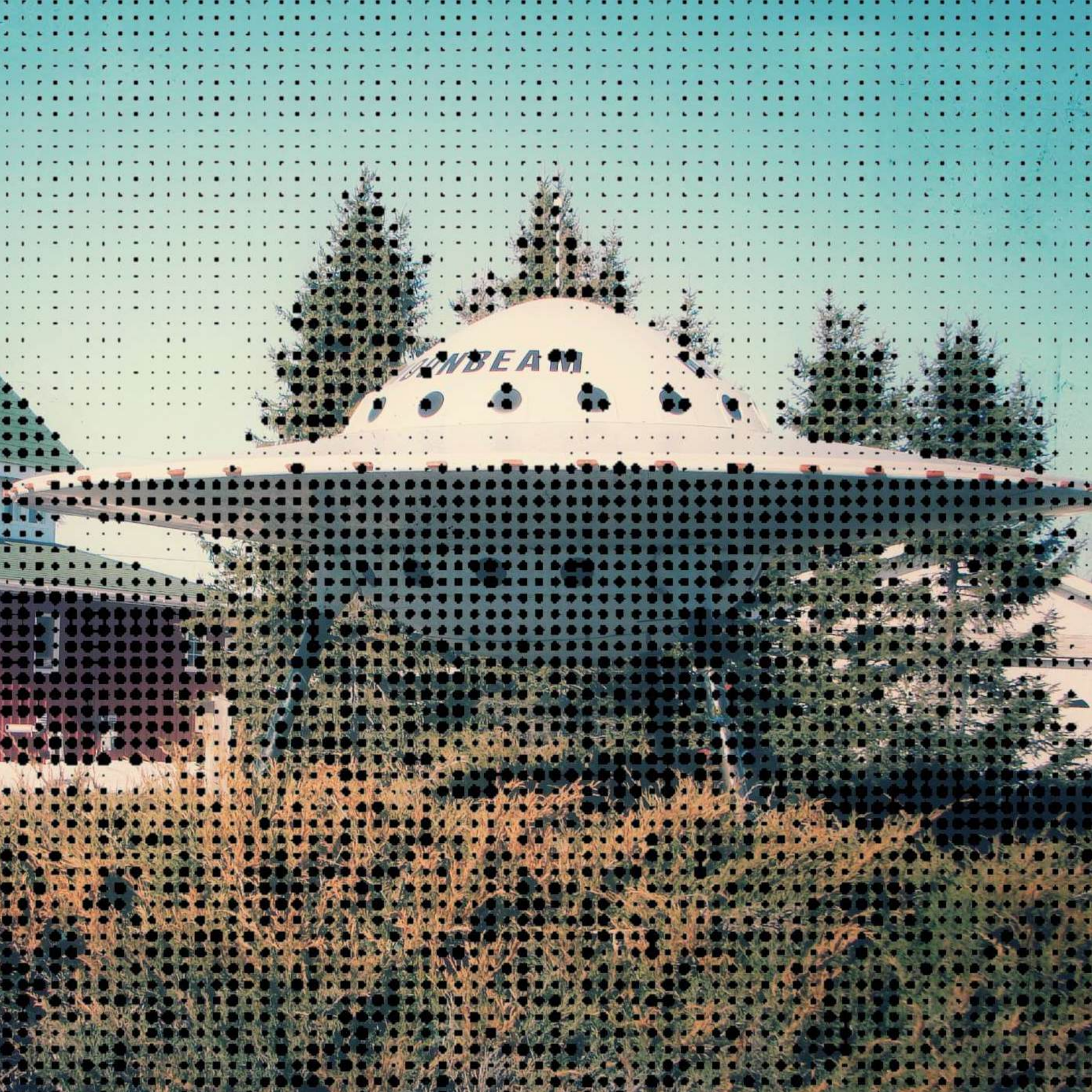
The four failed architects—embodiments of neglect, chaos, and mistrust—continue to stare from the fractured mirror, their whispers echoing in the void, blurring the lines of his reality.

And in this universe of broken dreams, Máj remains lost—writing his list, or perhaps being written by it. The words flow like a river of madness, a Chronosynclastic Infundibulum born from the depths of his fractured psyche.
What is real? What is true? If the boundaries between them dissolve with a single tear, and the air thickens with smoke and stardust, who is truly the sane one—the man with the grease pencil, lost in his own world, or the world itself, gone mad?

The last mouse is gone. Máj sits on the closed lid of the toilet, the room silent. The snake, a lump of warmth, has disappeared into its cave. The quiet is deafening—more than any saxophone solo, more than any trumpet cry.

He runs his finger over the crouton on the bathroom floor—a crumb of his own anxiety—and feels the weight of it. The tiny universe of its crumbly existence. A profound sadness settles in, inarticulate but palpable.

He knows what the doctor would say. He knows what it all means. But knowing doesn't make the crunch any less terrifying. And the mice, one by one, are always counted.


SUNBEAM

MUMBO-JUMBO FROM MOONBEAM'S MOONBOW

BY VAMP FITZPATRICK

In the bowels of Moonbeam's nuclear bunker, built during the Cold War's last gasp—when humanity thought hiding underground was a good idea—the air smells of rust, old batteries, and the faint tang of turkey jerky. Chains of corroded steel hold the **Anchorite**—a long-bearded, disheveled figure, dressed solely in Tootsie Roll-themed boxers Velcroed to a battered box of forgotten town documents—chewing endlessly on strips of leathery turkey, each bite a reminder that survival sometimes tastes like dried bird flesh, smoked and cured over the ashes of history. The bunker, a relic of paranoia, now functions as a shadow puppet theater, a sacred space for the absurd.

The anchorite—his beard sprawling like a tangled vine—stands center stage, clutching a tiny Dollarama flashlight, its weak beam barely illuminating the makeshift setup. His makeshift screen is a piece of wax paper stretched across a frame of old coat hangers, fluttering slightly with each gust of stale bunker air. He operates some battered 4-H project puppets—crudely painted, slightly lopsided, but full of character—dancing shadows that flicker on the fragile screen, shapes of myth, history, and absurdity.
Inside, two mice sit on a battered crate, their tiny paws clutching shadow puppets, eyes flickering with mischief and disdain. The first, Kara Hacivat, a sleek mouse with a scholar's nose, dresses in tiny spectacles and recites lore with a theatrical flair:

"You know, turkey jerky has roots deeper than the deepest trench—carved out by nomadic tribes, by Turkish soldiers, by desert traders—dried in the sun, smoked over fires, a testament to human resilience, and perhaps a nibble of divine stubbornness. It's been around longer than most empires, and it sticks around longer than most governments—like a chewy, leathery monument to survival."

The second, Çelebi Zıpır, a rotund, quick-witted mouse with a grin that could sour milk, snorts in reply:

"So, it's basically the universe's way of saying, 'Eat this or starve,' and somehow, it's also the snack of choice for bunker dwellers who believe in the power of dried flesh over fresh hope. I mean, a dried bird's a lot like this town—dried out, cracked, but stubbornly standing, waiting for the next gust of absurdity."

Moonbeam—a town founded in 1912 with the promise of prosperity from the arrival of the Canadian Northern Railway—grew from a handful of settlers into a quiet hub of resource extraction, lumber, and, briefly, a booming uranium boom in the 1950s. Its population, just over a thousand, lives in a perpetual state of "almost there"—a place where the main street is a gravel ribbon lined with faded signs and the occasional UFO-themed tourist trap, a relic of dreams that never quite materialized. Its main claim to fame? That mysterious, roadside UFO-shaped roadside attraction, a leftover from the 1980s, when a group of pranksters convinced the town to embrace its extraterrestrial destiny.

The **bunkers**? Oh, they are relics from the Cold War, built as a precaution—just in case, they said—when the world was certain that nuclear annihilation was inevitable, a kind of subterranean insurance policy. Now, they're used for shadow puppetry, secret meetings of the town's eccentric, and the occasional hiding spot for a mouse with big dreams and questionable morals.

Suddenly, from the sky—an inexplicable event—**Moonbeam's spaceship**—a battered, retro-futuristic craft with peeling paint and blinking LEDs—begins to rattle. It shudders like a junkyard starfighter, inexplicably taking off in a mad chase, chasing after the faint, shimmering arc of the moonbow.

The ship shoots upward—an awkward lurch of metal and hope—streaking across the sky like it's trying to catch a dream, or perhaps just a cosmic riddle wrapped in a cosmic gift

bag. Its thrusters sputter, and a plume of smoke and sparks trails behind as it accelerates in a frantic, almost comical pursuit of the spectral rainbow. "A" for effort. 96%.
Kara Hacivat squints at the sky:

“Is that...? No, it can’t be. That’s not how rockets work. Or maybe it is, and we just don’t have the manual for chasing moonbows.”

Çelebi Zıpır laughs, flicking his tail: “Maybe it’s a government experiment—trying to catch the light, or maybe just trying to find out if the universe’s biggest prank is hiding in a rainbow.”
Back on the makeshift stage, the shadow puppets—**Karagöz** and **Hacivat**, along with **Tiryaki** and **Mayor Çözücü**—continue their grotesque ballet, drawing symbols from Moonbeam’s forgotten past, where the bunker was built as a fortress of fear, and now serves as a theater of the absurd.

The **anchorite**, his beard sprawling beneath the Tootsie Roll boxers, waves his weak flashlight with a shaky hand, illuminating the crude puppets and the flying, streaking spaceship—an absurd chase that defies logic but embodies hope: that even in darkness, even in the dim glow of a dollar store flashlight, there’s a flicker worth pursuing.

“In this town,” the anchorite mutters, voice gravelly but tinged with a faint grin, **“even the spaceship chases after a moonbow. Maybe that’s the lesson—sometimes, you just gotta chase the light, even if it’s just a faint glow or a cheap flashlight’s flicker. Because that’s where the hope lives—right in the absurd pursuit.”**

The **moonbow**—a spectral arc shimmering faintly—flickers as the spaceship arcs upward, a mad, improbable chase across a sky full of faded dreams and cosmic jokes. Shadows, mice, puppets, and a bearded anchorite—dressed only in whimsical undergarments and dusty documents—stand united in the ridiculous, finding light in the pursuit, no matter how dim or expensive the glow.

Red Bull

THE BARKING MAD MIND *and the* GROWL *of the* BRILL MOTOR-OMNIBUS

By Dr. Morton Pevitz

[Enter Overcompensating, the tiny Chihuahua with a red Bull can in his doggie bowl, eyes darting like he's deciphering a cosmic code.]

Overcompensating (thoughtfully): "Hiya, kids! Follow the bouncing ball—it's academia's death wish time! Follow me through this hellscape of minutiae. Buckle up, tiny paws—here comes the rabbit hole."

Oswald Spengler, in his cramped apartment in Downtown Bangor, now a veritable fortress against the spectral ghosts of Der Untergang des Abendlandes (Spengler, 1918), which he's derisively renamed "I Told You So, Yuh Numbnutz," hums a discordant tune. That low, grinding sound echoes the existential feedback loop of the engine powering the Brill gasoline-driven motor-omnibus he observed earlier today—a machine embodying modernity's paradox: efficiency and hollow comfort, akin to Red Bull for a Chihuahua—artificial, fleeting, yet seductive (Harvey, 1990; Baudrillard, 1981). The vehicle, with its 31-passenger capacity and seats upholstered in Brill twill-woven seating rattan, becomes a metaphor for the West itself—a streamlined coffin on rails, promising progress but ultimately terminal.

Overcompensating (sniffing the air): "See that? Efficiency, economy, hollow comfort—like Red Bull for a Chihuahua. Artificial energy, fake vitality. Follow the bouncing ball—this is the sound of modernity's hollow roar."

He watches the snowplow clear a path outside, the building's owner paying for the service—just as he pays for hot water, heat, and sewer—smaller transactions in a universe of decay (Luhmann, 1995). The apartment itself, with granite countertops and stainless steel appliances, stands as a palimpsest of grand theories—yet beneath lies a hollow core, a symptom of late capitalist excess (Jameson, 1991).

Overcompensating (barking softly): "Progress? Or just another shiny thing to distract us? Like that shiny bowl of Red Bull—looks great, but it's just sugar and chemicals."

A flicker of memory: the face of Charles Walter Couldock (Couldock, 1844–1887), born in London, a man of two lives—carpenter, actor, lover, returned to the stage—becomes a microcosm of the disinherited mind, caught in an endless cycle of beginnings and endings, forever chasing the elusive "something." His life, entangled as if by sixteen miles of string, exemplifies the human pursuit of meaning amid chaos (Heidegger, 1927).
Overcompensating (tilting head): "Strings. Labyrinths. Endless knots. Follow the bouncing ball—see how they tie us up in history, culture, personal angst. Just like Duchamp's white string, a barrier, a game, a trap."

This string—this labyrinth—calls to mind Marcel Duchamp's "First Papers of Surrealism" (Duchamp, 1942), where he used "sixteen miles of ordinary white string" to create a barrier that confounded spectators, turning art into a trap of irrational logic (Lindner, 1988). Edward Alden Jewell described it as a "melodramatically baffling barrier," a shroud of chaos (Jewell, 1942). Similarly, Couldock, refusing at first to appear in Our American Cousin, only to finally step into the role of Abel Murcott, finds himself ensnared in a web of theatrical and existential knots—the disinherited mind's trap that frustrates understanding, veiling clarity behind tangled meshes of tradition, opposition, and subconscious desire (Eagleton, 2003).

Overcompensating (whining slightly): "Follow the bouncing ball—through this maze of references, footnotes, and philosophical detours. It's academia's death wish, but what's a dog to do? Sniff out the truths, one metaphor at a time."

In the quiet apartment, a faint harmonica sound drifts—phantasmic, ghostly: perhaps the echo of Jerry Murad's Harmonicats (Murad & Fiore, 1947). Their 1947 hit, "Peg o' My Heart," transcended charts—selling two million copies, spending 21 weeks at number one, and pioneering artificial reverb in recording (Gronvall, 2010). Murad, an Armenian born in Istanbul, had crafted a sound that, while innovative, was ultimately a manufactured illusion—a technological echo that mirrors the disinherited mind's illusory depth (Benjamin, 1936).

Overcompensating (tail wagging): "Artificial reverb—fake echoes, like our lives in the modern age. Sounds deep, but it's just an illusion. Follow the bouncing ball—what's real, what's fabricated? The music, the memories, the Red Bull."

This reverberation—a manufactured echo—symbolizes the hollowness of modern experience: the illusion of depth in a flat, commodified world (Baudrillard, 1981).

Murad's band, with members like Don Les—who, with congenital cataracts, saw only 30% of normal vision—paradoxically exemplifies how perception is often filtered, enhanced, or falsified for mass consumption (Lazarsfeld & Merton, 1948). Their ephemeral authenticity echoes the fleeting vitality of the current age—here today, gone tomorrow, like the last sip of Red Bull.

Overcompensating (suddenly inspired): "Follow the bouncing ball into the graveyard of authenticity. Artificial echoes, like our fleeting vitality—here today, gone tomorrow. Sniff-sniff, then on to the next illusion."

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Press the canoe below

↓

Straight, No Chaser

By Hermon Scott

The city, a breathing beast of concrete and steam, swallowed the sun whole. It was 1963, and New York wore a permanent coat of grime—a uniform of shadows and sharp edges. Vox, a man whose face was a map of forgotten streets and sleepless nights, moved through the throng with a purpose that felt more like an escape. The collar of his trench coat was pulled high against a wind that smelled of exhaust and rain. His fedora was a low-slung shield, obscuring a face that had seen too much and remembered every detail. He threaded through Midtown's human tide—suits and skirts, each person a solitary island in a sea of loneliness. The neon of Times Square bled into the twilight, pouring lurid colors onto wet pavement. His jaw was a tight knot, muscles clenched from a tension that ran deeper than the city's grit. It wasn't the city that tightened the wire in his gut; it was the slow, steady burn of his own mind.

He reached into the inner pocket of his coat, feeling the silk lining—a cool reassurance against his palm—and grasped the small, familiar bottle: Nardil. A tiny piece of manufactured calm in a world that had long since forgotten the meaning of peace. He swallowed the tablet dry, bitterness flooding his tongue—a small price for the silence it promised.

The cab, a yellow insect buzzing with a diesel heartbeat, became a temporary sanctuary. Vox gave the driver an address in Queens, a place where the city's concrete fingers loosened their grip, replaced by brick houses and the quiet hum of suburbia. He watched the city bleed away in the rearview mirror—each block a memory, each street a mistake. The drug's gentle hush began to settle in his mind, the low-grade static fading into manageable thrum.

Outside a Dusty Motel, Queens

A scrawny girl no older than fourteen darted toward him, hands fumbling at his trench coat pockets. Her face was quick, eager—yet cautious. When his grip closed around her wrist—cold, unyielding, like a vice made of bone and shadow—she froze.

"Looking for these?" Vox held up a crumpled pack of Camels, his voice flat and even.

"I—I thought you smoked," she stammered, yanking free. Her name tag, half-torn, read *Electra*. She looked up at him, eyes flickering with a mixture of defiance and curiosity.

"My Rabbi says smoking's bad for your lungs. My osteopath says you're better off with apple cider vinegar and honey. She got that idea from this book by some old Vermont doctor. Worked for me. Gave it up months ago."

Vox raised an eyebrow. "And yet you're stealing cigarettes."

A sly grin crept across her face. "Rabbi Lebowski doesn't know yet." She flicked a cigarette from the pack and lit it with a Zippo. "Where'd *you* get those?"

The question hung like a dare. Vox's mind flickered, flashes of memories – decades of them, flickering through his mind like faulty neon signs:

1926. "You'll end up like your father, chasing trouble with a bottle in one hand and a cigarette in the other. You're better than that, Samuel. Or are you just a waste of good Irish blood?"

1938. "You think you're the first boy to think you're tough? I've buried tougher men than you in this godforsaken town. Get a job, stop loafing around like a parasite."

1947. "War didn't break the world, boys like you did. Always looking for the next fix, the next thrill. You're not a man, you're a ghost haunting your own life."

He exhaled slowly, the memories dissolving like ink in water. “They used to help me think,” he said, watching the girl inhale. “Now they just remind me of how small everything is.”

Electra tilted her head, smoke curling from her lips. “You look like you’ve been everywhere. Rome, maybe? I heard they’ve got these… catacombs?”

Vox’s smile was a razor’s edge. “Among other things,” he said softly.
She shrugged and tossed him the pack. “Maybe the Vermont doctor can help you with whatever’s eating you up, too.”

He caught it reflexively. “Doubt it.”

As he turned toward the motel door, the words *apple cider vinegar* clung to him like a second skin—an improbable salve for a man who’d long forgotten how to heal.

On a Plane

The cabin was a whispery womb of artificial light. Vox watched clouds—like torn sheets of cotton batting—blur into a featureless gray. The drone of engines was a monotonous mantra, boring a hole straight into his skull and into the dark recesses of his mind, where unfiled memories flickered and sparked like faulty wiring.

How much of this journey was a flight from the streets of New York, from the ghost of a city that had long ago ceased to be a home? he wondered. *And how much was a pursuit of that hollow promise in a dusty Roman catacomb?*

The idea of a forgotten fortune—hidden in the ruins of Rome—was a faint whisper amid the chaos of his thoughts. The tiny white pill, the Nardil, was supposed to drown the noise, but it only pacified the surface. Beneath, the root of the sickness—the parasitic thought-worm—gnawed at him still, whispering louder with every bump and shadow reflected in the window.

His seatmate, a portly man with a face like a crumpled map, leaned in conspiratorially. “You got that look, friend,” he said, voice low. “The look of a man running from something.”

Vox kept his gaze fixed on the endless gray. “We’re all running from something,” he said, flat and emotionless. “Or to something. Sometimes it’s hard to tell the difference.”
He thought about the lie he’d told himself—about the vase, the lire, the quest for a vanished treasure. About the dream of disappearing into a new city, shedding the past like an old coat. But the truth was more bitter: he was a hunter of ghosts, a seeker of echoes. The pursuit of an artifact, the hope of wealth—these were just ways to keep moving, to keep the past from catching up.

The overdue bill for a life lived on borrowed time, unraveling with every mile traveled.

“To Rome, then?” the man pressed, oblivious to the chasm of thought.
“For now,” Vox replied, a grim, weary smile touching his lips. “For now, the story still says Rome.”

Beneath the Catacombs of San Callisto

The air tasted of dust and closely-guarded secrets. The vase—a 12th-century Byzantine piece etched with gold leaf and inscribed with a cipher only the dead might understand—wasn’t just a trinket. It was a key. To what? A vault? A ledger? A confession?
Vox didn’t care. The money—the *real money*, not the counterfeit coinage of his past—was hidden there, in the labyrinth beneath the city. His father’s secret, buried in 1943 amidst chaos, betrayal, and fire.

He’d spent years chasing rumors, feeding himself lies to justify his hunger. The Nardil, cigarettes, sleepless nights—all distractions from the true itch: burying the ghost of Samuel O’Connell, the man who gambled his son’s future on a bottle and a stolen artifact.

As the plane descended over the Tyrrhenian Sea, Vox stared at the patchwork of vineyards and olive groves below. Somewhere in that green maze, in the tombs carved by early Christians, the answer waited.
And when he found it—perhaps—he could finally stop running.

Static Bloom: A Wallace Synthesis

By Glitchsmith Atlas

(Music Cue: Opens with a distorted, heavily processed sample of a 1950s housewife jingle, pitched down and warped. This slowly transitions into a fragmented, sputtering lo-fi beat with heavy reverb and phasing effects.)

Act 1: Neon Fracture

(Visual B-Roll: Rapid cuts of digital artifacts – static bursts, corrupted pixelation, reversed audio fragments of city sounds. interspersed with grainy, low-resolution images of a cracked city street, flickering neon signs. Slow zoom onto a distorted reflection in a cracked mirror.)

(Voice Sample – Secret Wallace, heavily filtered and delayed)

“The cracked glass... Santa Monica Boulevard flickers... a broken heartbeat...”
(Ezra Pound-esque, rapid, almost incoherent)

“A flash of sequined dust... collateral of a shimmer... the engine of chaos...”

(Beat intensifies. A heavily compressed, distorted sample of a classic Hollywood score briefly cuts through the noise, then dissolves into a fractured, looping melody played on a detuned synthesizer.)

Act II: Muscle Carol's Ghosts

(Visual B-Roll: Grainy, hi-8 style footage of a woman in a 1950s dress, subtly distorted with glitch effects. Fast cuts of fragmented images: a chrome bumper morphing into a face, headlights becoming eyes. Overlay of text glitches and scrambled code.)

(Voice Sample – Thomas Pynchon-inspired, rambling, paranoid)
"The thoroughfare, a ribbon of fractured imagery... a liminality... where chronology dissolves... the weight of unfulfilled potential... the ghost in the algorithm..."

(Rapid-fire vocal samples – overlapping and distorted – chanting phrases from the original text: "Muscle Carol Productions... static... glitch... further travails... the void...")

(A brief burst of clean, melancholic acoustic guitar – quickly corrupted by digital distortion.)

ACT III: The Further Travails

(Visual B-Roll: Slow, drifting shots of a distorted cityscape. Text slowly dissolving and reforming. Abstract animations of fractured images and geometric patterns. Close-up of a single, pulsing pixel.)
(
Voice Sample – William F. Buckley-style, clipped, skeptical, but with increasing desperation)

“The further travails of Secret Wallace... a myth born in digital decay... is there a core... a fundamental truth... beneath the layers of noise?”
(Jack Kerouac-esque, breathless, stream-of-consciousness)

“Burning LA... a fever dream of manufactured desires... a mechanical heart beating in a wasteland... the taste of ozone and decay... a kaleidoscope of broken reflections... the engine of chaos... the beauty of the glitch...”

(The beat collapses into a chaotic wash of noise – static, clicks, pops, reversed samples, and distorted vocal fragments. The theremin melody fades in and out, creating a sense of unease and disorientation.)

(Voice Sample – Secret Wallace, now almost unintelligible, whispered and heavily distorted)
“...the only truth... the broken truth itself...”

(The distorted housewife jingle sample returns, but it’s now completely warped and fragmented, barely recognizable. It loops and fades into silence, leaving only a faint, persistent hum of static.)

(Final Audio Element: A single, sharp, digital “ping” – like a corrupted signal – punctuates the silence.)

Plastic and Static

BY W. E. GREYHEAD

(I. The Green Static)

The fern doesn't need water.
Doesn't need sun, though it pretends
to lean toward the smeared glass,
the parking lot's heat haze.
It's a green static, a held breath
in the fluorescent hum of the diner.
A promise of something living
that never arrives.
I watch it from the red vinyl booth,
picking at fries,
wondering if anyone notices
the perfect, unchanging curl
of each plastic frond.
It's a comfort, in a way.
A stillness that mocks the rush
of cars, the clatter of plates,
the brief, bright flares of human wanting.

(II. The Weight of Forever)

They chose this particular shade of green

to mimic hope, I think.
Or maybe just to soften the beige
of the vinyl, the chipped Formica.
It's been here for years, this fern.
Outlasting waitresses,
menu changes,
the slow creep of dust
on the plastic leaves.
It doesn't know about seasons,
about the ache of shedding,
the glorious, messy surrender
of decay.
It only knows the weight of forever,
a manufactured permanence
in a place built on fleeting appetites.
A silent witness to every goodbye,
every first date, every lonely lunch.

(III. A Kind of Offering)

Look closely.
The plastic is starting to yellow,
a subtle bruising around the edges.
A tiny crack in one of the stems,
almost invisible.
Even artificial things
begin to tell their stories.
It's a kind of offering,
this imitation of life.
A small, desperate attempt
to bring the outside in,
to remind us, even here,

among the grease and the neon,
that something like beauty
still exists.
And maybe, just maybe,
that's enough.

The Arena

By Michael Huang

The posters, peeling like skin from a forgotten promise,
glossy ghosts of faces, gone to rust.
Their bravado, a brittle shell, cracked
under the fluorescent hum. Glory tastes like dust,
a dryness in the throat.

Handwritten notes–
ink bleeding into the paper,
a hasty prayer, a secret unfurled
in the canvas's thread.
They clash with the slick promises,
a muffling, like holding your breath
under water, the slow ache of unspoken things.

Business cards –
tiny, folded fortresses.
Titles sharp as bone, numbers a coded prayer,
claiming their small patch of ground.
Armor made of ambition,
a brittle defense against the vastness.
Each edge a tiny cut, a trembling.

They fight not with fists,
but with syllables, with angles,
a spectacle of selves unfinished, unmoored.
Staged in this borrowed space,

a flickering purgatory, edged with shadow.

The audience,
a chorus of shadows watching, unseeing,
their applause a distant ache, a ghost limb twitching.
Neon bleeds across their faces,
painting them in hues of loss.
No victor. Just the persistent scrape
of signs against the silence.

A slow disintegration,
like a watercolor left out in the rain.
Fighting for a name,
dissolving back into the hum.
The final whistle, a long sigh.
And the echoes...the echoes keep falling
into the quiet earth,
a whisper of what might have been,
and might never be again.

The Liver's Lament: A Floating Organ's Ode to Vivaldi in Apartment 4

By Henry W. Kelman

1. The Liver Ascends (A Prelude in Minor Keys and Clawfoot Irony)

The calf liver—this calf liver, specifically—hovers three inches above the porcelain lip of a clawfoot bathtub in Apartment 4, 144 Essex Street, Bangor, Maine, where the radiators hiss like asthmatic accordions and the wallpaper peels in geometric despair. It is not a metaphor. It is a liver. It is floating. It is listening to The Four Seasons as performed by Itzhak Perlman and the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra, a recording so celebrated it has been played at funerals, weddings, and the occasional botched lobotomy.
(This floating organ embodies the Lacanian Real, stubbornly resisting symbolization. It exists outside the confines of language, a traumatic kernel that haunts the symbolic order, refusing to be fully integrated into the narrative of life.)

The liver, however, prefers the Spring concerto, though it cannot articulate why, as it lacks a mouth.

(Here, Lacan's Imaginary surfaces: the liver's desire for beauty, for harmony—yet it remains a fragmented image, a disembodied imago, longing for a completeness it can never attain.)

(The narrative glitches: the liver remembers, or perhaps hallucinates, a childhood spent in a butcher's window, where it was once displayed beside a sign that read "Tenderized."

The memory is unreliable. The sign may have been a hallucination. The butcher may have been a figment. The liver, after all, is not a reliable narrator.)

II. The Ballad of the Red Balloon (An Interlude in Helium and Minor Tragedy)

Outside, a red balloon drifts past the fire escape, tethered to nothing, a rogue apostrophe in the grammar of the sky. It bobs against the brickwork of the building, a silent witness to the liver's existential predicament.

(This balloon, floating aimlessly in the Lacanian Symbolic, signifies the unattainable object of desire—the objet petit a. It is an imaginary projection, a signifier that promises fulfillment but delivers only emptiness.)

The balloon does not judge. The balloon does not care. The balloon is, in its own way, as aimless as the liver, though it lacks the liver's gravitas.

(The popping sound—the balloon's death—is a Lacanian return of the repressed, a traumatic rupture that reveals the underlying mortality haunting the symbolic fabric.)

(The sound is a gunshot. The sound is a sigh. The sound is the liver's first and only orgasm.)

III. The Liver's Grand Tour (A Fugue in CD Players and Misinterpretations)

The liver, restless, drifts into the bedroom, where a cheap boombox plays Max Richter's Recomposed: Vivaldi. The liver does not like this version. It is too clean. Too digital. The liver prefers its decay unvarnished.

(This preference echoes Lacan's Real: the desire for authenticity, for the raw, unmediated truth of decay—an unfiltered encounter with mortality.)

In the kitchen, a jazz trio butchers Summer with a saxophone. The liver lingers, intrigued by the dissonance. The saxophone sounds like a goose being strangled. The liver relates.

(The dissonance is a Lacanian signifier—a sinthome—that knots together the fragmented desires of the organ and the listener, pointing towards the knot of the Real, Imaginary, and Symbolic.)

The living room offers a metal rendition—The Great Kat's shredded Presto—and the liver, for the first time, feels understood. The guitar's wail is the sound of its own cellular breakdown, a symphony of necrosis. The liver weeps, though it has no tears.
(
Here, the narrative fractures: the liver recalls, or invents, a past life as a concert pianist. Its fingers were legendary. Its liver was not. The memory is a lie. The liver has no fingers.)

IV. The Bathtub's Lament (A Postlude in Porcelain and Regret)

The liver returns to the bathtub, where Perlman's violin now sounds like a dirge. The water below is cold. The water below is a metaphor—a Lacanian signifier pointing to the Real of mortality.

(The liver, embodying the Real, does not care for metaphors. It is floating, listening, existing outside language, a trauma that refuses symbolization.)

The water below is cold. The water below is a metaphor. The liver does not care for metaphors. The liver is a liver. It is floating. It is listening. It is, in its own way, a kind of saint.

(The red balloon's corpse—a limp, rubbery sac—rests on the fire escape. The liver does not mourn it. The liver does not mourn anything. The liver is, after all, already dead.)

V. The Secret Sauce (A Recipe in Decay and Hyperbole)

Ingredients:

- 1 calf liver (preferably disembodied)
- 1 clawfoot bathtub (haunted)
- 3 CD players (each playing a different The Four Seasons)
- 1 red balloon (doomed)
- A suffocating sense of inevitability

Instructions:

1. Let the liver float. Do not question it.
2. Play Vivaldi at varying degrees of distortion.
3. Allow the balloon to pop. This is non-negotiable.
4. Stir in existential dread until the mixture thickens.
5. Serve cold, preferably in a room with peeling wallpaper.

(This recipe echoes Lacan's jouissance—the excessive pleasure in the act of decay—an act that confounds the symbolic order and immerses the subject in the Real of mortality.)
(The liver, now a relic, will outlast us all.)

🎓 **Lacanian Footnote:**
The liver's levitation may be read as a subversion of Cartesian dualism, wherein the corporeal transcends its own materiality through sheer, stubborn absurdity. The floating organ embodies the Real, resisting the symbolic and imaginary structures that seek to contain it. Only by deciphering the signifiers—the references, the music, the ruptures—can the reader momentarily knot the sinthome and glimpse the elusive objet petit a, that unattainable object that sustains desire.

🖼️ **Louvre Visual Reading:**
If this were a still life, the liver would be the vanitas element, though its decay is less a memento mori than a memento moriens—a reminder not of death, but of the act of dying, slowly, violently, in a bathtub, to Vivaldi.

🧃 7-Eleven Clerk with Pickleball Hat:
“Man, that liver’s got more problems than a mathematician on meth. Multiple problems multiplied. Amplified. Stratified. But never satisfied. Dig it, dawg."

Final Reflection:
Anyone who immerses themselves deep enough into this labyrinth of references, signs, and signifiers—deciphering the art, the music, the psychoanalytic echoes—will unlock a secret: a fifty percent discount on the “Reduced for Quick Sale” liver, the ultimate objet petit a—the very object that haunts this narrative. For in understanding the decay, you

acquire desire; in desiring the organ, you approach the trauma at its core.

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Reminder: Your dead goldfish has dance practice tomorrow.